Research, Extension and Education Programs Related to Private Forests

Testimony of
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Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee. My name is Colien Hefferan, and I am the Administrator of USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. CSREES is the agency of USDA which engages the national university-based agricultural knowledge system to develop science-based solutions and technologies to help farmers, ranchers, private forest-owners and rural communities remain productive and profitable in the face of considerable challenges.

Today I am appearing before the subcommittee to discuss the contributions that CSREES' programs make to the sustainability of the United States' expansive and diverse private forests. Working through the 105 land-grant colleges and universities and fourteen other forestry programs, CSREES supports the education of agricultural and natural resource professionals, the discovery of new knowledge by university scientists, and the transfer and application of that knowledge to solve real-world problems.

CSREES supports research, extension and education activities related to private forests through a combination of peer-reviewed competitive grants, formula funds and Congressionally determined priority projects. I would like to highlight four of these programs for the subcommittee.

The Cooperative Forestry Research Program, also known as the McIntire-Stennis Program, provides formula-based support to state-certified institutions to train new forest scientists in forestry and investigate important questions about the condition of our private forests. As a formula program, the federal investment in McIntire-Stennis is matched, on average, at a rate of 9 to 1 with non-federal funds, greatly extending the federal investment of $22 million per year. Since this program was authorized in 1962, it has trained thousands of forest scientists and supported research on subjects as diverse as the restoration of fragmented Mississippi Delta hardwood forests, the development of improved forest tree varieties. One McIntire-Stennis supported project, the New York Watershed Model Forest Program, devised forest management practices to improve the water quality of upstate New York reservoirs, preventing the need for an expensive water filtering system, saving New York City over $5 billion.

The Renewable Resources Extension Act, or RREA, provides funding for the application of new knowledge through Extension programs dealing with forest and range resources. RREA provides the impetus for natural resource educational programming at the Nation's land grant colleges. The federal investment in the RREA program of $3.1 million per year is matched 10 to 1 by non-federal funds, increasing the reach and scope of the programs offered. The priorities and topics supported by RREA are determined by the individual State Extension programs, leading to locally relevant solutions. The

program supports the development programs to educate private forest landowners on issues ranging from improved forest management to reduce environmental impacts of harvesting to teaching landowners how to market their forest-based resources more effectively. One example of an RREA supported project is the work done by the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service to train loggers in harvesting techniques that protect forest sustainability and water quality. As a direct result of this work, logging practices have been improved on 900,000 acres leading to healthier forests and cleaner surface water.

The CSREES National Research Initiative funds basic discovery research on key problems of national and regional importance through a peer-reviewed, competitive process. In fiscal year 2000 the NRI awarded over $4 million for research related to the improved production, management and utilization of forest products. Grant awards are supporting research into:

- fire regimes and ecosystem interactions at the University of Montana,

- how the natural re-growth of commercially important canopy trees are inhibited by subcanopy evegreen shrubs at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and

- the effects of insects, deer browsing and fire on the failure of natural oak regeneration at University of Pittsburgh.

The Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 authorized the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems at $120 million per year. This program integrates research, extension, and education to explore and solve priority problems and has become one of our most popular grant programs, receiving over $1 billion in requests each of the past two years. One section of the program deals specifically with the needs of private forest and rangeland owners. Last year this program awarded $4 million to a three state consortium for research, extension and education programs targeting the needs of private forest owners in the Central Hardwood region of the US, Indiana, Missouri, and Kentucky.

Taken together with the support for research and extension through the Hatch, Smith-Lever, and 1890 institution formula funds and 1994 Land Grant programs these programs form a continuum of cutting edge technology, management solutions and education programs for the nation's growing number of private forest landowners and managers.

But these are not stand-alone programs. As forest owners learn and understand more about their forests, they often need and desire assistance beyond the scope of our research, education and extension mission. Therefore, these university-based programs must be complimented by the technical and financial assistance programs administered by the USDA Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Agency.

University-based extension educators and research scientists work closely with other USDA agencies,

particularly the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, to provide relevant and timely educational programs. This is most evident at the state level, where extension educators work closely with state forestry agencies and district conservationists. In most cases this relationship works well, but we need to find ways to strengthen and expand our cooperative efforts.

There are many examples where Federal agency staff work very effectively with Federally-supported university scientists and educators. For instance, the land-grant universities have had a long-standing arrangement with the Forest Service and State Foresters in the Southern Region. Together, the Forest Service staff and the extension educator develop and deliver programs that meet the needs of our mutual stakeholders. This model may be applicable for a nationwide cooperative effort.

Land-grant colleges and forestry programs are also engaged directly with the Forest Service in cooperative research programs where the projects are jointly planned, supervised, and funded. University scientists collaborate with forest service scientists at locations across the nation on issues ranging from genetic improvement of tree species, development of new forest products, forest ecosystem management and fire risk reduction. In many cases Forest Service scientists are co-located on land grant university campuses. This arrangement provides the physical and human resources to conduct research programs that neither institution could undertake alone.

Forestry, like agriculture in general, is a science-based, global enterprise. As this subcommittee considers a forestry program for the upcoming Farm Bill, I would like to emphasize that the focus of our

forestry programs at the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service is to support informed decision-making by private forest owners for both the short- and long-term. Informed forest owners who are passionate about stewardship of their resources and who become more self-sufficient in their decision-making are the future for sustainability on the 448 million acres of private forests in the United States.